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International Day of Forests

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The General Assembly, in its resolution 67/200, decided to proclaim 21 March the International Day of Forests, in order to celebrate and raise awareness of the importance of all types of forests and of trees outside forests. The present report is prepared pursuant to resolution 67/200, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it, at its seventieth session, a focused and concise report on activities resulting from the implementation of the resolution. Based on voluntary input from 75 Member States and other relevant stakeholders, the present report provides an overview of activities undertaken in support of the International Day of Forests, since its first observance on 21 March 2013. The report also highlights initiatives undertaken by the secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests, including in collaboration with members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and United Nations entities.

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I. Introduction

1. As emphasized in the ministerial declaration of the high-level segment of the eleventh session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (see E/2015/42, chap. I, sect. A), the sustainable management of all types of forests is vital to facilitate transformative change and the achievement of sustainable development. It is estimated that over 1.6 billion people depend on forests for their subsistence, livelihoods, employment and income generation. At the same time, deforestation and degradation of forests continue to be a challenge for the world's forests. Ministers at the eleventh session of the Forum stressed the need to continue to promote a common understanding of the concept of sustainable forest management and to continue to cooperate internationally and bilaterally to promote sustainable forest management and address drivers of deforestation and forest degradation.

2. One of the key objectives of the international arrangement on forests beyond 2015 adopted at the eleventh session of the Forum (ibid., chap. I, sect. B) is to enhance cooperation, coordination, coherence and synergies on forest-related issues at all levels. Awareness-raising activities provide a framework for interactive communication and information exchange, which can facilitate cross-sectoral and cross-institutional cooperation and coordination.

3. The General Assembly, in its resolution 67/124 B, emphasized that public information and communication should be at the heart of the strategic management of the United Nations. In the same resolution, the Assembly recognized that developments in information and communications technologies open vast new opportunities for economic growth and social development, and can play an important role in the eradication of poverty in developing countries.

4. On 21 December 2012, the General Assembly, in its resolution 67/200, decided to proclaim 21 March the International Day of Forests, in order to celebrate and raise awareness of the importance of all types of forests and of trees outside forests.

5. In the same resolution, the General Assembly requested the secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), to facilitate the implementation of the International Day of Forests, in collaboration with Governments, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests[1] and international, regional and subregional organizations and processes as well as relevant major groups.

[1] The Collaborative Partnership on Forests consists of 14 organizations working in association to promote the implementation of sustainable forest management, namely, the Centre for International Forestry Research, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Tropical Timber Organization, the International Union of Forest Research Organizations, the secretariat of the Global Environment Facility, the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Agroforestry Centre, the World Bank and the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

6. The present report is prepared pursuant to resolution 67/200, in which the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its seventieth session a focused and concise report on activities resulting from the implementation of the International Day of Forests.

II. Actions undertaken in support of the International Day of Forests

A. Activities undertaken by the secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests

7. In 2013, the Graphic Design Unit of the Department of Public Information developed the official logo for the International Day of Forests[2] in collaboration with the secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests. The logo design is based on that of the previous International Year of Forests, 2011. The iconographic elements in the design depict many of the multiple values and benefits of forests and sustainable forest management. The logo was approved by the United Nations Publications Board and launched in all six official United Nations languages in March 2013.

8. In 2015, the Forum secretariat worked with members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests[3] to propose a central theme for the 2015 and 2016 celebrations of the International Day of Forests. It was thought that a global theme would help to coordinate communications and messages from the forest community, while it was recognized that countries and organizations would tailor the theme to their own priority areas. To that end, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests has proposed that the 2015 International Day of Forests should highlight the interlinkages between forests and climate change, and the 2016 Day should highlight the interlinkages between forests and water.

9. In 2014 and 2015, the Forum secretariat held special events to celebrate the International Day of Forests at United Nations Headquarters in New York. In 2015, the special event for the Day, on the theme "International Day of Forests: create a climate smart future", focused on highlighting forest-based solutions to climate change, and sustainable development more broadly. The event was chaired by the Director of the Forum secretariat, Manoel Sobral Filho, and featured opening remarks by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Gabon, Marianne Odette Bibalou. The event included a panel discussion on the theme "Forest-based solutions for climate mitigation and adaptation" with members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, including the Permanent Observer of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) at the United Nations, Narinder Kakar; the Director of the FAO Liaison Office in New York, Sharon Brennen-Haylock; and the Chief of the Liaison Office in New York of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, Melchiade Bukuru. During the general discussion, statements were made by the Deputy Permanent Representatives of Israel, Italy and the Russian Federation, as well as the representatives of Brazil, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Japan.

[2] www.un.org/esa/forests/outreach/international-day-of-forests/logo/index.html.

[3] www.cpfweb.org/en/.

10. In 2014, the International Day of Forests special event, "My forest, our future: celebrating forests for sustainable development", focused on highlighting the role of women as agents of change for forests and sustainable development. The event was chaired by the Assistant Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Thomas Gass. It included opening remarks by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Gabon and featured a keynote address by the Under-Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, Susana Malcorra. The event included a panel discussion on the theme "Women as agents of change for forests and sustainable development", with inspiring speakers and award-winning short films. Panellists included Forest Heroes Madison Vorva and Rhiannon Tomtishen and the award-winning filmmaker Rosa Rogers. During the general discussion, statements were made by the Permanent Representative of Indonesia, the Deputy Permanent Representatives of Argentina, Brazil, Finland, Gabon (on behalf of Forest Eleven) and the Russian Federation, as well as the representatives of Peru, Turkey and Suriname, followed by the representative of FAO. In addition to the special event, the 2014 celebration at United Nations Headquarters included a week-long series of film-screenings, and a two-week exhibition of award-winning photographs and children's art.

11. The special events were webcast live by United Nations Web TV and tweeted live by the Communications and Information Management Service of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. In 2014, the live webcast by United Nations Web TV engaged a global audience of more than 5,000 viewers. Over 100 experts, including representatives of Member States, regional organizations, members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and non-governmental organizations attended the events.

12. Since the first observance of the International Day of Forests in 2013, the Forum secretariat has been facilitating the preparation of messages from the Secretary-General on the occasion of the Day, as well as press releases on the Day. The press releases have also featured quotes from heads of member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, showcasing international action for forests and sustainable forest management.

13. In addition to messages from the Secretary-General and United Nations press releases and news stories, a large component of the communications campaign spearheaded by the Forum secretariat relied on utilizing social media. Through visual content, from award-winning films to infographics and ready-to-print forest posters, the campaign cultivated a diverse audience.

14. The 2014 social media campaign reached over 2.3 million Twitter accounts, making over 7 million impressions on 21 March 2014. The 2015 social media campaign saw a six-fold jump, reaching 20 million Twitter accounts and making 43.6 million impressions on 21 March. Over the course of the 21-day campaign in 2015, 26.5 million accounts were reached, making 87 million impressions.

15. The 2014 and 2015 social media campaigns were conducted by the Forum secretariat in partnership with the Department of Public Information, the Communications and Information Management Service of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests.

16. Design products and multi-media content have been essential for the success of digital campaigns. In 2015, the Graphic Design Unit of the Department of Public Information developed a special poster to co-brand the International Day of Forests with the United Nations "Time for Action" campaign. The poster was shared through social media with the public, United Nations Information Centres, United Nations partners and Forum on Forests National Focal Points.

17. The Forum secretariat, in collaboration with the Graphic Design Unit, has designed a menu of digital products for the International Day of Forests, which can be downloaded and printed on demand. These included promotional videos, 20 posters featuring forest heroes and children's art (2013-2015), 22 postcard designs featuring award-winning forest photographs (2013-2014), an exhibition booklet (2014) and a banner displayed on the fence near the visitors' entrance to the United Nations compound, as well as roll-up banners promoting facts about the Day. Of the top six Facebook posts in 2014, five were of design products. Of the top 10 tweets in 2014, three were of design products. All of the design products are available on the Forum secretariat's website.[4]

B. Activities undertaken by Member States

18. The Forum secretariat has received information from 75 countries on their celebrations of the International Day of Forests through voluntary national reports and communiqués. Many countries reported having formed partnerships with non-governmental organizations, research institutions, United Nations entities, the private sector and development actors to extend the reach of their advocacy efforts. Local communities, civil society organizations and United Nations entities together raised awareness about forests, launching campaigns on the need to invest in forests, and the links between forestry data and efforts to combat climate change. Low-forest-cover countries like Armenia, the Comoros, Kenya, Mauritania, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Yemen also celebrated the Day.

19. In 2014 and 2015, senior officials including Heads of State and Ministers of Environment from countries including Argentina, Brazil, Gabon, Guatemala, Jamaica, Kenya, Madagascar, Myanmar, Portugal, Zimbabwe and the State of Palestine participated in official ceremonies and events for the International Day of Forests. Those advocacy efforts spanned a broad spectrum of activities and often included tree-planting activities, as was the case in Algeria, Chile, China, Gabon, Grenada, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kenya, Lithuania, Madagascar, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Portugal, Samoa, Serbia, South Africa, Uganda, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the State of Palestine.

20. In 2015, the digital campaign in the United States of America, "The power of one tree — imagine what a forest can do", was accompanied by a Twitter hashtag (#ImagineWhataTreeCanDo) and included daily posts on national forest websites, Facebook and Twitter, as well as blog posts and e-brochures on how trees help to fight climate change. India launched a new online portal focused on promoting the benefits of forests through Indiaforest. Forest Europe developed a series of infographics, fact sheets and posters drawing on videogame images from the 1980s

[4] www.un.org/esa/forests/outreach/international-day-of-forests/design/index.html.

with the tag line "because climate change is not a game!" FAO developed a quiz, a WhatsApp message and 60-second promotional video, in addition to a special event on forests and climate change at FAO headquarters in Rome.

21. In 2015, Brazil awarded prizes to students and professionals for research papers and case studies on forests and economic development, while Cyprus engaged students through a series of lectures from the Department of Forests. The FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific organized a Kids-to-Forests field excursion for students and teachers to provide hands-on experience in forest restoration and sustainable forest management, in collaboration with local communities and governmental organizations.

22. Through tree-planting, Chile promoted knowledge of the role of forests in combating climate change, while in Iran (Islamic Republic of), Malaysia and Uganda tree-planting activities highlighted the need to protect and conserve forests and natural resources. Some countries, including Cyprus, the Republic of Korea and South Africa, celebrated the International Day of Forests as a complementary campaign to national Arbor Day celebrations. The Republic of Korea celebrated the International Day of Forests and the seventieth Arbor Day through a tree-hugging campaign that set the new Guinness world record (for largest tree hug). Over 1,200 people participated in the tree-hugging campaign at the Korea National Arboretum in Pocheon, Gyeonggi Province, Republic of Korea, on 21 March 2015.

23. The African Union's 2015 campaign on the theme "Addressing climate change in Africa through sustainable forest management," in partnership with FAO, included an expert panel discussion on the need for the forestry sector in Africa to work across sectors in improving policies and mechanisms for participatory and community-based land management. The International Tropical Timber Organization launched two flagship publications on sustainable forest management in the tropics, on issues related to voluntary guidelines for sustainable forest management and quantification of carbon benefits in the organization's projects.

24. Spain celebrated one hundred years of sustainable forest management of one of its national parks, in 2015. The Economic Commission for Europe and FAO held a series of round-table discussions, press conferences and an exhibition on "Forests for food — Food for forests". Italy organized a photography contest entitled "Click ... the forest awakens" from 21 March to 21 May 2015.

25. In 2015, Jamaica's Forestry Department organized a forest trek, to take members of the public on a hike through a forest to enjoy the biodiversity and beauty of the environment while exercising. Algeria organized courses on afforestation techniques, while India engaged nearly 200 forestry officers and scientists in brainstorming workshops on emerging issues in the forestry sector. Mexico held a series of talks, aimed at college students, on the importance of State forests.

26. During its 2014 celebration of the International Day of Forests, the Dominican Republic recognized the contributions of goods and services provided by forests for the welfare of society. The United States focused on the importance of the benefits of forests to all citizens, while Nepal celebrated forest conservation and management at the local level and Jamaica raised awareness of the role of people in protecting and sustainably utilizing forests. Zimbabwe focused its celebrations on the topic of protecting forests for improved livelihoods, and encouraged knowledge-

sharing on community-based forest management and small and medium-sized forest enterprises. The State of Palestine emphasized the socioeconomic aspects of forests and promoted afforestation activities. Madagascar promoted the multifunctional importance of forest ecosystems through public advocacy campaigns broadcast on television and radio.

27. Indonesia ran a television and radio campaign, a photography contest on Facebook and an exhibition on forests and national development, and complemented those outreach initiatives with posters and banners to promote the 2014 International Day of Forests. Samoa ran radio and television advertisements, organized poster competitions, and held traditional singing contests. Ukraine held a drawing and essay competition on forests and people for students.

28. The Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Madagascar and Portugal organized forestry debates, seminars and conferences, along with sculpture and painting exhibitions in 2014. In addition to organizing an exhibition involving environmental agencies and a radio campaign, Jamaica encouraged students to express their views on forests through a poetry competition. Switzerland, together with the Economic Commission for Europe and FAO, hosted an art event entitled "Forests for fashion" that included day-long events focusing on the contributions of the sustainable forestry sector. Artists, designers and representatives of the private, business, fashion and forestry sectors gathered to discuss the potential of forests to supply sustainable fibres. Zimbabwe organized an exhibition on the value of forestry for food security.

III. Actions undertaken by Member States to raise awareness of forests

29. The lack of political and public awareness of forests is often cited as a challenge related to implementation of sustainable forest management. In national reports submitted to the United Nations Forum on Forests at its eleventh session,[5] 81 countries reported having carried out a wide range of communications activities to raise public awareness of important benefits arising from forests.

30. Seventy-five countries published promotional materials on forests, such as brochures, pamphlets, leaflets and posters. In its eighth national forest inventory report, China highlighted the role of forests in socioeconomic development, in maintaining ecological security and in addressing climate change. Guinea raised public awareness through pamphlets in its national languages. Indonesia produced posters and brochures to engage youth at schools. Guatemala and Malaysia focused on mangrove protection and training forest producers, and New Zealand and Samoa released publications on sustainable forest management. Portugal launched a national campaign to illustrate the socioeconomic importance of forests to the national economy.

31. Seventy-two countries reported having broadcast campaigns promoting forests through television and radio stations. Among those countries were Azerbaijan, Belarus, Botswana, Canada, Costa Rica, Cyprus, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jordan, Liberia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the

[5] www.un.org/esa/forests/documents/national-reports/unff11/index.html.

Niger, Pakistan, Panama and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The Congo, Grenada and Lithuania broadcast campaigns on sustainable forest management. China focused on achievements in forest shelter belts, while Yemen ran weekly radio and television programmes dedicated to the importance of afforestation and forest and soil conservation. Bolivia (Plurinational State of) promoted awareness of the benefits arising from forests through television commercials. Japan ran television and radio programmes and supported the production of forest-related novels and movies with the private sector. The United States created various materials, including documentaries, public service announcements and data-sharing tools, and promoted international cooperation with the Working Group on Criteria and Indicators for the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Temperate and Boreal Forests for non-European Countries. It also created 45 videos showcasing forest projects for the World Congress of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations and launched an advertising campaign on forest fire prevention. The State of Palestine created a film about the rehabilitation of degraded vegetation in dry areas.

32. Fifty-nine countries, including France, Lithuania, Madagascar, Mauritius and the United States, held exhibitions and art events; a photography exhibition was held in Mexico; film festivals were held in Albania and Nigeria; theatre performances were held in the Congo; an open-air museum on forestry was created in Slovakia; and travelling exhibitions were organized in India and Luxembourg.

33. Sixty-seven countries, including Afghanistan, Angola, Canada, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and the Russian Federation, reported on public events held to promote the important benefits of forests. The participatory process for the preparation of the *Government Report on Forest Policy 2050* of Finland involved regional meetings and wider public engagement through an online portal. Debates, seminars and conferences on developments and scientific research in the forestry sector were held in Malaysia, the Niger, Romania and Slovakia and annual trade shows were held in Canada, Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania.

34. Eighteen countries reported hosting other activities to promote public engagement in forest activities. Among the activities were nationwide tree-planting events in Botswana, Canada, China, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya and Liberia and reforestation campaigns in Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritania, Myanmar, the Niger, Nigeria and the United Republic of Tanzania.

35. A number of countries established awards for excellence in the field of forestry. Austria awarded individuals a "forest ambassador prize" as part of its national forest week celebrations. Similarly, an annual prize for achievement in the area of forest economics and markets was awarded in Brazil. Kenya granted awards for sustainable livelihood and integrated approaches to ecosystem rehabilitation. Mexico established its national forestry merit award and, in 2011, Portugal launched a national prize for architecture in wood to encourage and promote the forestry sector. Samoa focused on innovation through a participatory three-dimensional modelling process.

IV. Conclusions

36. **The General Assembly in its resolution 67/200 noted that there was no globally recognized date for commemorating and raising awareness of forests and sustainable forest management, prior to the establishment of the**

International Day of Forests. At the same time, the Assembly recognized the many existing events, at all levels, which celebrate and honour all types of forests and trees outside forests. The numerous events held worldwide in celebration of the International Day of Forests, since 2013, demonstrate both the high level of interest in forest-related issues and the relevance of sustainable forest management to development challenges.

37. Through the communication campaigns held at the subnational, national, regional and international levels, the International Day of Forests has undoubtedly helped to shine a spotlight on the importance of forests in creating a greener, more sustainable future for all. In this regard, raising awareness of the importance of forests and trees is an integral component of efforts to strengthen implementation of sustainable forest management and to integrate forests into the post-2015 development agenda.

38. While there is no "one size fits all" approach to raising awareness, the inputs received show that the key types of communication activities were launching of publications, television and radio broadcast campaigns, community events such as tree plantings, learning events such as workshops and symposia, cultural events featuring art, music and poetry, and awards recognizing excellence in the field of forestry.

39. Sharing information and promoting greater understanding of forests can be achieved through the multiple activities described above. Changing behaviour is more difficult to achieve and measure, however. In an age of information overload, communication campaigns have to be targeted to specific audiences: for example, statistics and data often resonate better with policy and scientific communities, while personal stories often resonate better with community and youth constituencies.

V. Recommendations

40. The General Assembly may wish:

(a) To take note of the activities undertaken in support of the International Day of Forests, and renew its invitation to all Member States to devote the International Day of Forests to presenting and promoting concrete activities with regard to all types of forests and trees outside forests;

(b) To further encourage Governments, relevant regional and international organizations and major groups to organize activities related to all types of forests and trees outside forests, and support such activities, inter alia, through voluntary contributions;

(c) To encourage all relevant organs of the United Nations, including the functional commissions and the regional commissions, as well as United Nations system agencies, funds and programmes, to fully support, contribute to and participate in the activities related to the observance of the International Day of Forests;

(d) **To promote the observance of the International Day of Forests not as an isolated event but as part of a continuing process of advocacy and partnership to foster greater awareness and action to further strengthen sustainable forest management at all levels, including through the promotion of forest contributions to the post-2015 development agenda, and the communication strategy of the strategic plan of the international arrangement on forests for the period 2017-2030.**